

JDAM course ushers B-1 students into new era

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*by Staff Sgt. Ed Scott
Air Warfare Center Public Affairs*

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. (AFPN) -- The U.S. Air Force Weapons School B-1 Division at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., now exposes upcoming aircrew instructors to the latest weapons available -- joint direct-attack munitions.

"This is the first time the B-1 Weapons School has been able to expose students to a new weapon prior to its operational debut with all B-1 units," said Lt. Col. Dan Walker, B-1 Division commander. "We were able to introduce the weapon system into the syllabus without adding more days."

The colonel said the school increased syllabus sorties to accommodate the weapon through a tighter flying schedule. JDAM training was added to the current syllabus six months ago. The development of the missions and training of the aircrew began in July.

The B-1, a long-range strategic bomber, has always been capable of flying intercontinental missions, penetrating enemy defenses, then performing a variety of missions using Mark-82 conventional 500-pound bombs as well as CBU-87/89/97s without refueling.

"Adding JDAMs to the B-1's arsenal makes it more effective," said Walker. "An aircrew can directly pinpoint and destroy a hardened target directly, ensuring accuracy, making the B-1 a much more valuable asset."

The aircraft is capable of holding 24 of these Global Positioning System-guided weapons -- more than any other aircraft in the world, "which means the B-1 is capable of holding more targets at risk," Walker said.

"Being able to carry 84 500-pounders makes the B-1 a formidable asset. With JDAM we can strike more hardened targets with accuracy," he said.

Walker said this addition to the bomber's arsenal is significant.

"Mostly gone are the days of carpet bombing. There really aren't too many targets strung out over a quarter-mile area. Today's battles require weapons to be right on target," he said.

Walker said JDAMs are similar to laser-guided munitions, except that laser-guided munitions are hindered by rain and fog.

"Being GPS-guided eliminates this problem with JDAM," Walker said.

"With the new strike packages being created by (aerospace expeditionary force), the B-1 is especially suited for the composite forces," he said. "With the aircraft's speed and altitude, JDAM effectively puts a lot of firepower into a strike package."

Another advantage Walker pointed out is the fact that commanders can know if the mission was a success "minutes after target attack."

When this class graduates in June, Ellsworth and Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, will have experienced JDAM aircrews.

"As we graduate other classes, we will gain experience at all B-1 bases," Walker said.

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